

UNCLASSIFIED

General Canine Sets the Record Straight --- or not! January14



General Canine attending the Travis Trophy ceremony in 1966, about the time he also returned for the seminar that is the focus of this article

General Ralph Canine, NSA's first director, returned to the Agency in 1965 to reminisce about his time as DIRNSA. His appearance was sponsored by the National Cryptologic School and billed as a seminar for the edification of the next generation of leaders. General Canine was joined on stage by a number of then-current NSA seniors who had worked with him in the early days; they asked him leading questions and chuckled appropriately

at his comments --- which he delivered in the rough-and-ready style he was famous for at NSA.

Canine had graduated from Northwestern University in 1916, intending to become a doctor, but, he said, "the First World war rescued me and my future patients." He further explained that he had entered the Army in 1917 and earned his commission at an officers' training camp. He purposely avoided military schools because "they said I could get to fight quicker. I didn't."

His management abilities got him into staff work. He rose steadily in the Army in the aftermath of World War I and in World War II was chief of staff of a corps in George Patton's Third Army. As the American military downsized after victory in 1945, Canine was one of many officers who had to take on new types of jobs in an Army that was larger than the 1930s but considerably smaller than in wartime. Canine was appointed deputy of the Army's G-2 (intelligence), with the expectation he would eventually become the G-2 himself.

In 1951 when it was the Army's turn to name the director of the Armed Forces Security Agency --- NSA's predecessor organization --- the Army Chief of Staff,

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

General Joseph “Lightning Joe” Collins, put up Canine’s name. One of the participants in the 1965 seminar asked Canine why he had been nominated. “Well,” said Canine, “I was violently against it.... I knew nothing about intelligence, but I knew even less about the COMINT/COMSEC business.” He added that “I knew a little bit about managing people after managing a good many soldiers,” but, except for secretaries, he had never managed civilians. He said he asked “Joe” why he had been named, but at that point in the 1965 discussion, he was asked a follow-on question that changed the subject, so we’ll now never get to know what General Collins’s response was.

Canine recalled that he had had one brush with a SIGINT unit during World War II in Europe. He was the senior logistics officer for the European Command in Heidelberg, and was concerned that the mobile SIGINT company attached to the U.S. 1st Division would never move on time. “I told them that their chow wagon didn’t need to go back to the quartermaster dump where they picked up their rations because I had already told them not to issue anything to them. And, if they moved, I would tell them to feed them. They moved.”

Later in the 1965 discussion, Canine expanded a little on the decision to move NSA to Fort Meade in the mid-1950s. A committee had studied the question of relocating NSA from the Washington, D.C. area, where it would be destroyed if the Soviet Union launched a surprise atomic attack; the committee had recommended that the Agency relocate to Fort Knox, Kentucky.

As news of this decision got around the Pentagon, Canine received a telephone call peremptorily summoning him to see the Secretary of Defense. Secretary Robert Lovett ordered Canine to go to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and tell them NSA was not moving to Fort Knox. Further, Lovett said Canine was to return the next day with a recommendation for an alternate site.

Finished with the secretary, Canine walked to the office of Omar Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Canine told the joint chiefs what Secretary Lovett had said and reminded them that the Air Force had insisted, as related in the minutes of one of the Joint Chiefs’ meetings, that NSA should never move more than 25 miles from the Washington Monument. Bradley told Canine they

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

would have a meeting the next morning before he could go in to see the secretary.

The original recommendation for Fort Knox had listed Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and Fort Meade as possible choices. Canine mulled the question overnight, and the next day he told the Joint Chiefs he had decided on Meade. Several of the senior officers were against it, but the Chief of Naval Operations, William M. Fechteler, said "Why don't we let him do it." This brought the others around.

Canine told Secretary Lovett that Meade was the choice, and that it had been endorsed by the Joint Chiefs. Lovett named several members of Congress who needed to be informed immediately and sent Canine on his way. Canine in 1965 summed it up this way: "As a result of this, Fort Meade acquired a new 18-hole golf course, at least a thousand sets of quarters, and many other attributes in support of the Agency."

Historians have a saying that covers reminiscences like this --- "If they aren't true, they ought to be!"

508 caption: an elderly General Canine, in civilian suit and tie, standing in the middle row of the auditorium, with an admiring crowd around him, applauding

UNCLASSIFIED